



SENATOR

Debbie Regala

E-Newsletter - 27th District, Tacoma

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27th Legislative District

May 8, 2009

Dear Neighbors,

This will no doubt go down in history as one of the toughest sessions ever.

Upon arriving in Olympia in January we faced a budget crisis best described as simply unprecedented. And then it got worse.

Washington's resilient economy succumbed to worldwide economic pressures in late 2008. The housing market froze. Unemployment, home foreclosures and requests for public assistance began to climb. Consumer spending pulled back. And in a state that relies upon the retail sales tax to provide a little over half its operating budget, tax collections began to dry up.

By the time Gov. Chris Gregoire produced a budget proposal in December the state's projected budget shortfall had swelled to \$6 billion.

Economic news continued to worsen well into the new year. In January Boeing and Starbucks announced the planned elimination of nearly 17,000 jobs. So when the state's Revenue Forecast Council produced a new projection of tax collections in March, the shortfall was recalculated to a once unthinkable figure — over \$9 billion, or about a quarter of the state's entire operating budget.

Though it's difficult to compare the two eras, the shortfall was easily the state's largest since the Great Depression.

Though profound, the crisis hardly set Washington apart. Elsewhere in the country 45 other states were reporting a collective budget shortfall of over \$350 billion.

The Legislature began attacking the problem early. On Feb. 13 the Senate approved a series of administrative cuts and other savings to pare the first \$735 million off the shortfall. It was sent to the governor's desk five days later; the earliest any Legislature had approved steep budget cuts in modern history.

In late March the House and Senate introduced similar operating budget proposals. Though they made use of roughly \$3 billion in one time federal stimulus dollars and \$2 billion from fund shifts, use of reserves and public employee compensation reductions, the single largest component of the solution was roughly \$4 billion in painful cuts throughout state agencies, services and state funded programs. Budget writers from both chambers worked long hours together to develop a final proposal.

The solution called for adding roughly 7,000 public employees to the ranks of the unemployed. It slashed spending for education and higher education, increased college tuition by extraordinary levels and decimated budgets for health care and human services programs.

But it also managed to maintain a safety net, albeit a smaller one, for the state's most vulnerable populations.

And it was more than just a crisis management plan. The budget, written with an eye toward the future, was also the foundation for a recovery plan and a remodeled state government. Programs thought to be most sustainable over time were identified and sustained, even as they, too endured cuts. A robust reserve was left in place to prevent even deeper cuts should the economy worsen further.

While the budget crisis required lawmakers to set priorities and make difficult decisions, the final solution did not pick winners and losers. Rather, it shared the sacrifice. And in the process it balanced the budget.

The final budget was heartbreaking for me. I did not run for office to achieve these ends, to lay off teachers, close doors to the state's colleges and universities, strip the working poor of their health insurance or slash general assistance payments to the unemployable.

But, I also know I was elected to make tough decisions, whatever they may be, whenever they may be required.

Despite these tough decisions, I am proud of work done to move our economy forward. Our transportation and capital budget (though much smaller than previous years) gives us the opportunity to provide jobs and keep our economy going. Many of the bills passed and decisions in our operating budget set the course for more efficient and effective use of state revenues.

As we face the difficult months ahead, I know you will join me in reaching out to neighbors. So many people are struggling and if we all lend a hand, the road to recovery will be all the quicker. As always, I welcome your thoughts. My door is always open.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debbie Regala".

Sen. Debbie Regala

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Operating budget — programs I am proud of

As a member of the Ways & Means Committee, much of my work this session revolved around the operating and capital budgets. There are a few small yet critical items in the operating budget that I personally worked hard to preserve even at some level of reduction. I believe each is an important part of our social safety net.

- The Council for Children and Families works in communities across the state to prevent child abuse and neglect. One of the proven programs, they help implement home visiting nurses who provide early childhood intervention and enhance parenting skills. The Council has been recognized as a national leader in the effective delivery of this evidence-based program.
- TeamChild advocates for youth to divert them from delinquency or failure in school by addressing their basic needs.
- The Traumatic Brain Injury Council administers the Traumatic Brain Injury Account in the state treasury to facilitate a public private partnership in providing services to individuals with traumatic brain injury.
- The Adult Vision Program provides glasses for Department of Social and Health Services clients who rely on Medicaid for their vision care. An added value is the glasses are made by inmates in the Airway Heights Correctional Industries program. The inmates are learning a valuable skill for when they re-enter society and in the mean while they are earning a small wage to help pay restitution to their victims, defray some of the costs of their incarceration and provide support to their family.
- There was a task force established to review our laws and procedures regarding sex offenders after the tragic death of Zina Linnik. One of the recommendations was funding to local law enforcement officers to personally verify the residence of registered sex offenders. This program has proven to be very effective in enhancing public safety by monitoring registered sex offenders living in communities around the state.
- Civil Legal Aid is provided for low and no income people to get legal representation for small civil matters.
- The Office of Public Defense (I serve on their Advisory Committee) should be contacted for criminal defense matters.
- Volunteer Chore Services provides effective low-cost community-based assistance to help elderly and disabled clients remain in their own homes.
- Additional funding was provided for Washington's food banks and we preserved funding for school meals.

Capital budget — building the infrastructure of our future

In the final 2009 – 2011 capital budget, some of the most important funding for the 27th district was for projects that will focus on basic care and furthering education. A few projects include:

- Allocating \$1.9 million towards building the new Eastside Clinic will provide access to health care for many low-income families.
- Goodwill's Milgard Work Opportunity Center in the Hilltop district will receive \$1.85 million dollars towards their 63,000-square-foot, four-story LEED Silver certified green facility which is already under construction. Goodwill's mission is to expand job-training and placement services for people with disabilities in the greater Pierce County area.
- University of Washington Tacoma will receive \$34 million towards the renovation of the Joy building which is expected to serve an additional 600 students.
- Bates Mohler Communications Technology Center will receive \$1.755 million.
- The Foss Waterway Seaport Balfour Building is allotted \$750,000 for rehabilitation including seismic bracing to ensure public safety.
- South Tacoma Community Center will receive \$1 million.
- \$800,000 for Allen Place, an after school activities venue for youth in Tacoma's Hilltop neighborhood.
- \$950,000 for a new children's park near McCarver Elementary School to honor Zina Linnik.
- A total of \$460,000 is dedicated to soil remediation at child care centers around Tacoma to clean up contamination from Asarco Smelter.

Transportation budget — creating local jobs and improving facilitation of commerce

The final state transportation budget includes many projects for the 27th district which will help enhance ease the daily commute and facilitation of commerce. Some of the highlights include:

- [HOV lane addition](#) from the Port of Tacoma Road Interchange to the King County Line. \$62.2 million in federal stimulus funds is allocated for this project which will create an estimated 350 jobs. This project was chosen to ease congestion on this heavily-traveled section of I-5. Currently it is in the design phase and is scheduled to advertise for construction bids on June 15, 2009.
- \$7.8 million of the federal stimulus funds will be used to accelerate preliminary engineering on the [I-5/SR 16 Eastbound Nalley Valley](#) project, which is scheduled to go to construction in 2011.
- Buying the land on which [SR 167](#) will be expanded to connect Puyallup and Fife. The state proposes connecting the highway, but isn't in the position to do so now. Buying the land now will ensure it isn't developed which would be much more costly in the future, when the state is ready to move forward with construction.

For a list of all transportation projects in Pierce County, click [here](#).

Some of the bills I sponsored that passed this session

- [SB 5433](#) provides local jurisdictions with more flexibility in the use of existing tax revenue for public safety, mental health, and other core services. It also grants local transit agencies the ability to seek voter approval of additional revenue for congestion reduction purposes. For more detail on this bill please read my [blog](#).

- [SB 5261](#) establishes a statewide unified sex offender registration and notification system.
- [SB 5285](#) improves the procedures for appointing advocates for children, Guardian Ad Litem or Court Appointed Special Advocates, in court proceedings. The legislation includes requiring additional background information be provided.
- [SB 5987](#) revises state law regarding training of Department of Corrections employees to ensure their training more closely focuses on the unique skills needed to work in our prison system.
- [SB 5231](#) modified dependency and family court procedures for determining parenting plans. The goal is quicker resolutions saving time and money for both courts and state agencies and most importantly the families involved. This policy became law via a House companion bill – [HB 1239](#).
- [SB 6149](#) passed in the form of [HB 2327](#) and reduced or eliminated the frequency of reports required of state agencies thus saving many staff hours and a potential of \$100,000.

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Washington Senate Democratic Caucus